MANKIND'S DEBT TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

The Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies was established in 1985 to promote a better understanding of Islam through advanced research, teaching, and co-operation between Muslim and non-Muslim scholars and academic institutions. It aims to sponsor research programmes concerned not only with religious, cultural, and historical aspects of the Islamic tradition but equally with the relevance of Islam to the needs of contemporary Muslim societies. Among the means of achieving these aims, particular emphasis is placed on the provision of visiting fellowships and research scholarships to promote academic collaboration with overseas universities and on the maximum practicable co-operation with the University of Oxford and a close association with St. Cross College.

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MANKIND'S DEBT TO THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

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by

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

PREFACE

The Qur'an describes the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) as a blessing for the whole universe. His message was restricted neither to a people nor a time. Its affect on the course of history has been varied and profound, and its impact universal. No other person in history has been more attentively studied than the Prophet. From the beginning of his mission Muslims meticulously collected information about every aspect of his life, the ideal model for them to follow. Over time a new discipline devoted exclusively to the study of the sayings and actions of the Prophet developed - *hadith and sunnah* - and Muslim scholars devised strict canons of enquiry and criticism to sift reality from legend.

The great love and reverence in which the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) is held is best illustrated by the fact that in their prayers Muslims the world over ask for God's peace and blessings upon him, and do so five times each day. In terms of the impact of his message it is perhaps sufficient to recall that the Divine revelation which the Prophet received, the Qur'an, is, as Professor Mazrui recently reminded us, the book which, in its original language and form, is the most widely read in human history.

For the Centre, the life and teachings of the Prophet are, naturally, an important area of academic interest and inextricably linked to its goal of promoting better understanding of Islam. Rarely has this need been more acutely felt than in recent months. The Centre invited a leading Islamic scholar, Maulana Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, to deliver a public lecture on the Prophet. Maulana Abul Hasan, whose writings have been an inspiration not only for other scholars but for a wide variety of movements, kindly agreed to speak on "Mankind's Debt to the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh)". Given the context and content of the lecture, it attracted a large audience. It was felt that, as it addressed

issues of immense contemporary interest and concern, the Centre should make it available in published form. It is hoped that its publication will contribute to a better understanding of Islam and through understanding mutual respect and tolerance between peoples.

F A Nizami
Director, Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies

October 1989

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

MANKIND'S DEBT TO THE PROPHET

Friends,

In certain parts of the world, people enjoy freedom of conscience and choice, are free to lead their lives in peace and amity, to devote their energies to teaching and preaching, researching and making new discoveries. Even these parts of the world (which we would wish to make more amicable, more pleasant and cultured) have not been so tolerant, nor free from uncivilised strife, nor disposed to co-existence of different peoples, sects and groups, still less sufficiently broad-minded, to accommodate differences of opinion.

Mankind has seemed, many times, to be bent upon self-destruction, passed through stages when, by its own misdeeds, it has forfeited any right to survival. Men have sometimes behaved like crazed and ferocious beasts, and flung all culture and civilization, arts, literature, decency, the canons of moral or civil law, to the winds.

All of us know that the writing of history is of relatively recent origin. The 'pre-historic' era was very much longer. The decline of mankind when it relapsed into savagery was by no means an agreeable task for historians and writers to record. Nevertheless, we do find narratives of the downfall of empires and the decay of human society, told at long intervals in the pages of history. The first of these date from the fifth century A.D. - some are briefly touched on here.

H G Wells, the well-known historian, writes about the decay of the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires:

> Science and political philosophy seemed dead now in both these warring and decaying empires. The last philosophers of Athens, until their suppression, preserved the texts of the great literature of the past with an infinite reverence and want of understanding. But there remained no class of men in the world, no free gentlemen with bold and independent habits of thought to carry on the tradition of frank statement and inquiry embodied in these writings. The social and political chaos accounts largely for the disappearance of this class, but there was also another reason why the human intelligence was sterile and feverish during this age of intolerance. Both empires were religious empires in a new way, in a way that greatly hampered the free activities of the human mind.[1]

The same writer, after describing the onslaught of the Sassanids on Byzantium and eventual victory of the latter, comments on the social and moral degradation to which both these great nations had fallen:

> A prophetic amateur of history surveying the world in the opening of the seventh century might have concluded very reasonably that it was only a question of a few centuries before the whole of Europe and Asia fell under Mongolian domination. There were no signs of order or union in Western Europe, and the Byzantine and Persian empires were manifestly bent upon mutual destruction. India also was divided and wasted.[2]

Another writer, Robert Briffault strikes a similar note:

> From the fifth to the tenth century Europe lay sunk in a night of barbarism which grew darker and darker. It was a barbarism far more awful and horrible than that of the primitive savage, for it was the decomposing body of what had once been a great civilization. The features and impress of that civilization were all but completely effaced. Where its development had been fullest, e.g., in Italy and Gaul, all was ruin, squalor and dissolution.3

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1 H G Wells, *A Short History of the World* (London, 1924), p. 140.

2 *ibid.*, p. 144.

3 Robert Briffault, *The Making of Humanity* (London 1919), p. 164.

The civilization nurtured by the ancient religions was disintegrating, according to J H Denison. In *Emotion as the Basis of Civilization*, he writes:

> In the fifth and sixth centuries the civilized world stood on the verge of chaos. The old emotional cultures that had made civilization possible, since they had given to men a sense of unity and of reverence for their rulers, had broken down, and nothing had been found adequate to take their place.....
>
> It seemed then that the great civilization which it had taken four thousand years to construct was on the verge of disintegration, and that mankind was likely to return to that condition of barbarism when every tribe and sect was against the next, and law and order was unknown..... The old tribal sanctions had lost their power.....
>
> The new sanctions created by Christianity were working division and destruction instead of unity and order. It was a time fraught with tragedy. Civilization, like a gigantic tree whose foliage had overarched the world and whose branches had borne the golden fruits of art and science and literature, stood tottering..... rotten to the core.[4]

Now, at the time when mankind and human civilization were on the edge of destruction, the Lord and Creator of the world caused a man to be born in Arabia who was entrusted the most difficult task: not only to rescue mankind from imminent destruction but also to raise it to heights sublime beyond the knowledge of historians and the imagination of poets. If there were not incontrovertible historical evidence to demonstrate his achievements, it would be difficult to believe their greatness. This man was Muhammad (peace be upon him) who was born in the sixth century. He saved mankind from the threatened and imminent danger, gave them new life, new ambition, fresh energy, a revitalised sense of human dignity and intellect and idealism. It was because of him that a new era came about, of spirituality in art and literature, of personal sincerity and selfless service of others, which produced an ordered, graceful and kindly culture. His most precious gifts to man were devotion to righteousness and aversion to evil, hatred of false gods and passion for establishing justice and morality, and the readiness to lay down one's life for these righteous goals. Such goals ultimately are the fountainhead and incentive for all reforms and improvements. Whatever great and sublime heights man has attained

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4 J H Denison, *Emotion as the Basis of Civilization* (London 1928), p. 265.

have been owed to these noble sentiments - indeed, all material resources, means and methods owe their existence to human will and determination. That great benefactor of humanity replaced barbarism and brutality with the milk of human kindness, magnanimity and courtesy. He struggled unceasingly for the propagation of his noble teachings with complete disregard to his own self, his life or prestige.

It was because of that struggle that there arose, from among an uncivilized and ill-mannered people, noble-hearted men who led a graceful and kindly life, who started a new era of courtesy and warmth in human history, who engendered gentleness and goodness in the men around them. The world obtained a fresh lease of life; justice and fairness became its hallmark; the weak were emboldened to claim their rights from the haughty and strong; mercy and kindness became norms. It was the time when humanitarianism became a driving force, faith and conviction captured human hearts, mankind began to take pride in selflessness, and virtuous behaviour became habitual with the people.

We list here in brief the precious gifts of Islam which have played a key role in the advancement of human values and culture. A new and bright world, quite different from the decaying and disintegrating humanity at the time of its advent, came into being as a result of these contributions of Islam:

1. The clear and unambiguous creed of the Oneness of God.
2. The concept of human equality and brotherhood.
3. The concept of human dignity and man being the masterpiece of God's creation.
4. Acknowledgement of the proper status of women and restoration of their legitimate rights.
5. Rejection of despair and infusion of hope and confidence in human beings.
6. Fusion of the secular and the sacred, the refusal of any cleavage between them.
7. Integration of religion and knowledge, making one dependent on the other and raising respect for knowledge by declaring it a means of attaining nearness to God.
8. Emphasis on the use of intellectual faculties in religious and spiritual matters and encouraging the study and contemplation of natural phenomena.

9. Charging the followers of Islam with the responsibility of spreading virtue and goodness in the world, and making it a duty incumbent on them to restore truth and justice.
10. The establisment of a universal creed and culture.

I will not elaborate these points. Instead, I would rather cite a few eminent thinkers and writers of the West who have acknowledged these virtues of Islam. One of the bases of culture and civilization - something that enhances gentility, and refinement, civility, in conduct as well as in literature - is the acknowledgement of a truth, appreciation of the great achievements of others and returning thanks to those who have done any favour to us. The day this noble sentiment is expelled from our lives, literature, ethical standards, intellectual labours, even the right of expressing our thoughts freely, will become meaningless. It will not be a world to live in and die for. It will be a world of beasts and brutes where the ruling passion is to fend for oneself alone. No sentiment will remain except fulfilment of carnal desires. All rightly ordered relationships between teacher and taught, benefactor and beneficiary, physician and patient, even between parents and children, will peter out and lose their significance.

Gratitude, as defined by William H Davidson, a contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, is a spontaneous and natural sentiment generated by kindness and benefit conferred by someone. It is a human virtue, abiding and universal. Davidson says:

> Gratitude has been defined as that delightful emotion of love to him who has conferred a kindness on us, the very feeling of which is itself no small part of the benefit conferred. (Thomas Brown, *op. cit.*, lxiii). Gratitude is an unselfish joyous response to kindness - a response that is immediate and spontaneous; the ultimate meaning of which is that human nature is so constituted that affection and unity between persons is the foundation of it, ill-will and enmity (all indications to the contrary notwithstanding) being abnormal and depraved.5

Ingratitude is thus a moral depravity and perversion of human nature, a sign of benumbed human conscience. The lowest depth to which this immorality can fall is the ingratitude shown to founders of religion, the

5 *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburg, 1913), Vol 6, 391.

teachers of morals and the greatest benefactors of humanity. Grotesque parody in deliberately offensive language is not appropriate of any person, let alone of those noble souls who have founded religions, for it hurts the feelings of millions who not only follow them but are also willing to lay down their lives for them. An effort at such offensiveness also means a denial of truth. No cultured people, country or society should tolerate or defend anyone so depraved and unmannerly, who possesses no conscience.

Now let us refer to the compliments paid to the greatest benefactor of humanity by a few eminent men of letters of this part of the world where I am speaking. One of these candid men, Lamartine of France, says in his tribute to the prophethood of Muhammad (pbuh):

> If greatness of purpose, smallness of means, and astounding results are the three criteria of human genius, who could dare to compare any great man in modern history with Muhammad? The most famous men created arms, laws and empires only. They founded, if anything at all, no more than material powers which often crumbled away before their eyes. This man moved not only armies, legislations, empires, peoples and dynasties, but millions of men in one-third of the then inhabited world; and more than that, he moved the altars, the gods, the religions, the ideas, the beliefs and souls. On the basis of a Book, every letter of which has become law, he created a spiritual nationality which blended together peoples of every tongue and of every race. He has left us as the indelible characteristic of him Muslim nationality, the hatred of false gods and the passion for the One and immaterial God. This avenging patriotism against the profanation of Heaven formed the virtue of the followers of Muhammad; the conquest of one-third of the earth to his dogma was his miracle; or rather it was not the miracle of man but that of reason. The idea of the unity of God, proclaimed amidst the exhaustion of fabulous theogonies, was in itself such a miracle that upon its utterance from his lips it destroyed all the ancient temples of idols and set on fire one-third of the world.[6]

John William Draper, the reputed author of *A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe,* writes:

6 Lamartine, *Histoire de la Turquie* (Paris 1854) Vol II, pp. 276-77.

> Four years after the death of Justinian, A.D. 569, was born at Mecca, in Arabia, the man who, of all men, has exercised the greatest influence upon the human race.[7]

He says further:

> Muhammad possessed that combination of qualities which more than once has decided the fate of empires..... Asserting that everlasting truth, he did not engage in vain metaphysics, but applied himself to improving the social condition of the people by regulations respecting personal cleanliness, sobriety, fasting and prayer.[8]

The great historian-philosopher of this century, A J Toynbee, is on record that:

> The extinction of race consiousness as between Muslims is one of the outstanding achievements of Islam, and in the contemporary world there is, as it happens, a crying need for the propagation of this Islamic virtue.[9]

It is a strange coincidence that over a hundred years ago Thomas Carlyle chose Muhammad (pbuh) as the supreme hero, and now, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, Michael H Hart of the United States of America has prepared a list of the most influential persons in history and placed the Prophet at the top of that list.[10]

The Prophet of Islam and his followers conferred favours on humanity which have played an unforgettable role in the promotion and development of culture and civilization. We will mention here only two of these, amply supported by historical evidence.

Students of history are aware that in the thirteenth century the civilized world, divided by the two great religions, Christianity and Islam, was suddenly confronted with a situation which threatened with

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7 John William Draper, *A History of the Intellectual Development of Europe* (London, 1875), Vol I, p. 329.

8 *ibid.*, p. 330.

9 A J Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (New York, 1948), p. 205.

10 Michael H Hart, *The 100-A Ranking of the Most Influential Persons in History* (New York, 1978).

imminent destruction both of the then vast empires, their arts and sciences, their culture and morals, in short, all that the human race had laboriously achieved during the past hundreds of years. Imminent ruin threatened to engulf all the accomplishments of mankind and reduce them once more to barbarism. It was brought about by the sudden rise of Genghis Khan (Tamuchin), a chieftain of nomadic Mongol tribes, who possessed remarkable qualities of leadership and was able to carry all that came in his way. In 616/1219 Genghis Khan turned towards the western and northern civilized countries and ravaged them with fire and sword. How severe a blow the Mongol invasion dealt to all social and cultural progress in the field of religion and learning, arts and crafts and industrial development in these civilized countries, can be gauged by a few graphic descriptions of Mongol rapine and slaughter given by Harold Lamb, the biographer of Genghis Khan:

> .... cities in his path were often obliterated, and rivers diverted from their courses; deserts were peopled with the fleeing and dying, and when he had passed, wolves and ravens often were the sole living things in once populated lands.[11]
>
> And consternation filled all Christendom, a generation after the death of Genghis Khan, when the terrible Mongol horsemen were riding over western Europe, when Boleslas of Poland and Bela of Hungary fled from stricken fields, and Henry, Duke of Silesia, died under the arrows with his Teutonic Knights at Liegnitz[12] - sharing the fate of the Grand-Duke George of Russia.[13]
>
> Such details are too horrible to dwell upon today. It was a war carried to its utmost extent---an extent that was very nearly approached in the last European War. It was the slaughter of human beings without hatred---simply to make an end of them.[14]
>
> Unchecked by human valour, they were able to overcome the terrors of vast deserts, the barriers of mountains and seas, the severities of climate, and the

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11 Harold Lamb, *Genghis Khan* (London, 1928), pp. 11-12.

12 Now known as Legnica, a town near Wroclaw in Poland, bordering East Germany.

13 Lamb, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

14 *ibid.*, p. 166.

> ravages of famine and pestilence. No danger could appal them, no stronghold could resist them, no prayer for mercy could move them.[15]

> His achievement is recorded for the most part by his enemies. So devastating was his impact upon civilization that virtually a new beginning had to be made in half the world. The empires of Cathay, of Prester John, of Black Cathay, of Kharesm, and - after his death - the Caliphate of Baghdad, of Russia, and for a while the principalities of Poland, ceased to be. When this indomitable barbarian conquered a nation all other warfare came to an end. The whole scheme of things, whether sorry or otherwise, was altered, and among the survivors of a Mongol conquest peace endured for a long time.[16]

Harold Lamb correctly says that the impact of the Mongols, brought about by Genghis Khan, has been well summed up by the authors of the *Cambridge Medieval History* in these words:

> This 'new power in history' - the ability of one man to alter human civilization - began with Genghis Khan and ended with his grandson Kublai, when the Mongol empire tended to break up. It has not reappeared since.[17]

The terror of the Mongol invasion was not confined to Turkistan, Iran and Iraq alone. The Mongol atrocities provoked trembling even in far-off corners of the world where the Mongols could have hardly been expected to carry their arms. Edward Gibbon writes in his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*:

> The Latin world was darkened by this cloud of savage hostility; a Russian fugitive carried the alarm to Sweden; and the remote nations of the Baltic and the ocean trembled at the approach of the Tartars, whom their fear and ignorance were inclined to separate from the human species.[18]

The Mongols first attacked Bukhara and razed it to dust. Not a single soul was spared by them. Thereafter, they laid Samarkand in ruins and massacred the entire population. The same was the fate of

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15 *ibid.*, p. 210.

16 *ibid.*, p. 206.

17 *ibid.*, p. 210.

18 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, (New York, n.d.) Vol III, p. 634.

other urban centres in the then Islamic world. The Tartars would have most probably devastated the whole of Christendom (then divided politically and suffering from numerous social evils, already mentioned earlier), as stated by H G Wells:

> A prophetic amateur of history surveying the world in the opening of the seventh century might have concluded very reasonably that it was only a question of a few centuries before the whole of Europe and Asia fell under Mongolian domination.[19]

Harold Lamb also writes:

> We only know that the German and Polish forces broke before the onset of the Mongol standard, and were almost exterminated; Henry and his barons died to a man, as did the Hospitallers..... In less than two months they had overrun Europe from the headwaters of the Elbe to the sea, had defeated three great armies and a dozen smaller ones and had taken by assault all the towns excepting Olmutz.[20]

But then a miraculous event changed the course of history. It not only allowed the civilized world to heave a sigh of relief but also permitted culture and civilization to be built afresh. The hearts of the indomitable Mongols were captured by the faith of their subjects who had lost all power and prestige. Arnold writes in *The Preaching of Islam:*

> In spite of all difficulties, however, the Mongols and savage tribes that followed in their wake were at length brought to submit to the faith of those Muslim peoples whom they had crushed beneath their feet.[21]

The names of only a few dedicated servants of Islam who won the savage Tartars to their faith are known to the world, but their venture was no less daring nor the achievement less significant than a great and successful reform movement. Their memory shall always be cherished as much by the Muslims, as by Christendom, or rather by all mankind, since they rescued the world from the barbarism of a savage race, the insecurity of widespread upheaval, and allowed it to again devote its

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19 H G Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

20 Harold Lamb, *op. cit.*, pp. 231, 234.

21 T W Arnold, *The Preaching of Islam* (London, 1935), p. 227.

energies to the establishment of social and political stability. The normalcy thus restored once again allowed the world to resume its journey of cultural development and promotion of arts and crafts, learning and teaching, preaching and writing.

After the death of Genghis Khan, his vast conquests were divided into four dominions headed by his sons' children. The message of Islam then began to spread among all these four sections of the Mongols who were before long converted to Islam.[22]

The Tartars not only accepted Islam - a number of great scholars, writers, poets, mystics and fighters in the way God, rose from amongst them. Their conversion to Islam completely changed their outlook and disposition, and their attitude towards humanity and civilization, which benefited not only the Islamic East but also Christendom and even India. The Tartars made nine or ten attempts to capture India during the thirteenth century but the Sultans of Turkish descent, among whom Alauddin Khilji (d.716/1316) and his commander Ghiyathuddin Tughluq (d.725/1324) were the more prominent, repelled them on each occasion. It was on account of them that the cultural and intellectual heritage of this ancient and prosperous country was saved from destruction and the two great religions, Islam and Hinduism, continued to flourish there.

This achievement of Islam, the transformation of the Tartars into a civilized people, was a service of a defensive nature rendered to humanity in general, and to the West in particular.

Another accomplishment of Islam, in contrast to the one just described, was to introduce a new method of thought and learning. It was like a flash of light in the Dark Ages of Europe and paved the way for its Renaissance. It transformed not only Europe but helped the entire human race to be benefited by new researches and discoveries. A new era of empirical sciences was inaugurated which has changed the face of the earth. The intellectual patrimony of the ancients (consisting of philosophy, mathematics and medicine) found its way to Europe through

22 For details see 'Tartars - The Scourge of God', in the author's *Saviours of Islamic Spirit* (Lucknow 1983), Vol. I, pp. 277-311. T W Arnold's *The Preaching of Islam* also gives some details of the conversion of the Mongols to Islam.

Muslim Spain. This intellectual gift consisted of observation and experiment, and inductive logic which replaced deductive logic, and completely changed Europe's way of thought. Science and technology were the fruits of this new way of thought. All the discoveries made by European scientific exploration - in short, whatever success has so far been achieved in harnessing the forces of nature - are directly related to inductive reasoning, not known to Europe until it was beqeathed to it by Muslim Spain. The noted French historian, Gustave le Bon, writes of the Arab contribution to Modern Europe:

> Observation, experimentation and inductive logic which form the fundamentals of modern knowledge are attributed to Roger Bacon but it needs to be acknowledged that this process of reasoning was entirely an Arab discovery.[23]

Robert Briffault has also reached the same conclusion, for he says:

> There is not a single aspect of European growth in which the decisive influence of Islamic civilization is not traceable.[24]

He further says:

> It is not science only which brought Europe back to life. Other and manifold influences from the civilization of Islam communicated its first glow to European life.[25]

Those who have studied the history of the Catholic Church and the Reformation are aware of the profound effect of Islamic teachings on the minds of those who initiated reform in Christendom. We can see the influence of Islam reflected in the thought of Martin Luther's (1483-1546) Reformation movement. The revolt against autocratic leadership in the Catholic Church in medieval Europe also reveals the influence of Islam, which had no organised church.

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23 Translated from the Urdu rendering of G le Bon's *La Civilization des Arabes Tamaddun-i-Arab* by Syed Ali Bilgrami (Lucknow, 1985), p. 400.

24 Briffault, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

25 *ibid.*, p. 202.

Friends,

It is our moral duty to acknowledge both these great favours conferred by Islam which have had a revolutionary significance for the world. When we speak of those who conferred these gifts or reassess their achievements we must at least keep in view the rules of courtesy which have been accepted by all nations and cultured peoples and schools of thought. We should not abandon the norms of politeness, moderation, dignity and truthfulness, for these have been commended by the scriptures of all religions, moral treatises, by great writers and critics. It is on such civilized behaviour that good relations between different religions, communities and peoples depend - such behaviour alone makes possible a purposeful dialogue between persons holding different views. In its absence all serious writings, critiques and reviews must degenerate into obscene and sensational novels, vulgar and outrageous parodies. Such writings can unleash negative and disruptive forces, not only contemptible in themselves and harmful to serious intellectual endeavour, but also likely to embitter relations between different nations and countries.

The argument that any restraint placed on freedom of expression amounts to coercion, restriction of personal freedom, or interference in the rights of individuals under the constitution of an independent country, is simply untenable. Obscene and offensive description of the benefactors of mankind, prophets and reformers, particularly if such narration is against the established facts of history, hurts the feelings of millions who respect and revere them and is also likely to cause disharmony between different groups within a country or even between countries. It is an intolerable infringement of moral values, an offence against humanity, that should not be overlooked by any peace-loving nation upholding the value of harmonious co-existence between its different ethnic and religious communities. Western political thinkers, too, do not subscribe to such an unlimited right of freedom of expression. They have argued that such unlimited liberty would be even more harmful than the limits placed on freedom of expression. The subject might be treated at great length, but I will cite here only two authorities who have explained why limitations on freedom of expression are essential for the maintenance of public order.

Isaiah Berlin explains the two concepts of liberty in these words:

> To protest against the laws governing censorship or personal morals as intolerable infringements of personal liberty presupposes a belief that the activities which such laws forbid are fundamental needs of men as men, in a good (or, indeed, any) society. To defend such laws is to hold that these needs are not essential, or that they cannot be satisfied without sacrificing other values which come higher - satisfy deeper needs - than individual freedom, determined by some standard that is not merely subjective, a standard for which some objective status - in principle or *a priori* - is claimed.
>
> The extent of man's or a people's liberty to choose to live as they desire must be weighed against the claims of many other values, of which equality, or justice, or happiness, or security, or public order are perhaps the most obvious examples. For this reason, it cannot be unlimited.[26]

The speech delivered in the American Senate by Blackstone in 1897 which forms the basis of American law on the subject, says about freedom of expression:

> Every free man has an undoubted right in law to air what sentiment he pleases before the public; to forbid this is to destroy the freedom of the press: but if he publishes what is improper, mischievous, or illegal, he must take the consequences of his own temerity. To subject the press to the restrictive power of a licenser... is to subject all freedom of sentiment to the prejudices of one man, and make him the arbitrary and infallible judge of all controversial points in learning, religion and Government. But to punish.... any dangerous or offensive writings which, when published, shall on a fair and impartial trial be adjudged of pernicious tendency, is necessary for the preservation of peace and good order, of Government and religion, the only solid foundations of civil liberty. Thus, the will of individuals is still left free; the abuse only of that free will is the object of legal punishment.[27]

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26 Isaiah Berlin in *Modern Political Concepts* (ed.) William Ebenstein (Delhi, 1974), p. 187-188.

27 Quoted in H M Seervai, *The Constitutional Law of India* (Bombay, 1983), Vol. I, p. 492.

Friends,

I would like to conclude my talk with an exhilarating poem by Dr Iqbal, the poet of the East, as he is known in the Muslim world, in which he enchantingly depicts the great favours conferred on humanity by the prophethood of Muhammad (on whom be peace and blessings of God) which are unique and unparalleled.

Touched by the breath of the unlettered one,
The sands of Arabia began to sprout tulips.
Freedom under his care was reared,
The 'today' of nations comes from his 'yesterday'.
He put heart in the body of man,
And from his face the veil he lifted.
Every god of old he destroyed,
Every withered branch by his moisture bloomed.
The heat of the battle of Badr and Hunain,
Haider and Siddiq, Farooq and Hussain.
In the thick of battle the majesty of *Azan*,
The recitation of *As-Saffat*[28] at the point of sword.
The scimitar of Ayub, the glance of Bayazid,
Key to the treasures of this world and the next.
Ecstasy of heart and mind from the same goblet,
Fusion of Rumi's rapture and Razi's thought.
Knowledge and wisdom, faith and law, polity and rule.
Yearnings hidden within the restless hearts.
Al-Hamara and Taj of beauty breath-taking,
To which even angels pay tribute.
These, too, a fragment of his priceless bequest,
Of his glimpses just one glimpse.
His exterior these enthralling sights,
Of his interior even the knowing unaware.
Boundless praise be to the apostle blessed,
Who imparted faith to elevate a handful of dust.

28 Title of Sura XXXVII of the Qur'an.

Other titles available:

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